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ABSTRACT

In the 1980s, nontraditional education is becoming an outdated term, because elements of such education have been integrated into most colleges and universities. The major innovation within nontraditional education is the external degree. Valley developed six major models of external degrees: administrative facilitation, modes of learning, the examination, validation, credits, and complex systems. Learners choosing external degree programs at the associate and bachelor levels are adults who choose to avoid sacrificing commitment to work and family responsibilities, who are seldom influenced by credit for work or life experience, who work fulltime in responsible positions and earn commensurately, and who are motivated by personal satisfaction and increased respect. Two barriers to growth in higher education innovation are lack of adequate information about nontraditional choices and quality. A network of accessible adult counseling centers nationwide is needed to help potential adult students assess needs and locate educational providers. To evaluate the educational structure and traditions, multiple indicators that assess both process and outcomes should be used. Adult educators must be watchdogs to ensure quality education for adult learners. (YLB)

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Paper presented at the 1982 National Adult Education Conference--San Antonio, Texas

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Title: Mapping the Terrain in Adult Learning: A Focus on Growth Areas and Innovative Practices--The Non-traditional University

This is a Texas sized presentation this evening. I will conclude the panel's remarks by addressing non-traditional university education. By way of pertinent background, I have a commitment to the external degree concept. My doctorate was earned as an external degree from Nova University and I am a Co-Cluster Coordinator for Nova in Wisconsin. Overall, however, I knew little about non-traditional education and I realized the public, the potential consumer, must have similar knowledge lacks. This awareness provided impetus for my topic.

Because you are at the AAACE (American Association for Adult and Continuing Education) convention devoted to innovations in learning, you may be more knowledgeable, so to start, let's share information. How many of you hold a non-traditional degree?___An external degree?___How many of you would define non-traditional education as being of lesser quality than traditional education?___Of better quality?___ About the same quality?___. Next, raise your hands when you think the schools I name grant non-traditional degrees. Walden___, Harvard___, Antioch___, Evergreen___, University of Wisconsin___, Ohio University___, University of Oklahoma___, Florida State University___, Johns Hopkins___. Thank you. Each school grants non-traditional degrees in some programs (Davis, 1976; Hartman, 1979). Surprised?

In the 1970's, non-traditional education gained credibility and in the 1980's, non-traditional education is becoming an outdated term. Elements of such education have been integrated into most colleges and universities. Schools have discovered

> traditional and non-traditional are not adversaries. The rigor and discipline of the traditional approach should commend it to the attention of the non-traditionalist--opportunities for

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> individual and independent study, for flexible patterns and techniques or for lifelong enrichment are equally worthy of notice by the traditionalist.
>
> (Gould, ed., 1973)

But for clarity, let me define non-traditional and explain the external degree. Gould (1972) defines non-traditional as "a group of changing educational patterns caused by the changing needs and opportunities of society." Placed in juxtaposition to the time-space-academic accounting trilogy which often defines traditional education--namely, prescribed years of study, residence on campus, and a credit system--non-traditional education becomes one of the innovations in learning that this conference addresses. Aside from technological advances in the teaching process, the major innovation within non-traditional education is the external degree.

Valley developed six major models of external degrees which aid understanding of this term. You will recognize the innovations these modes imply, and patterns that have become part of many traditional schools.

1. Administrative Facilitation. Not often recognized as an external degree because the university keeps its normal degree pattern, this model is earned outside the central structure of the university and thus is regarded as external. Often called evening, extension, or correspondence schools, the university establishes an organization and/or facilities to serve a different clientele. Harvard's Associate and Bachelor of Arts in Extension Studies are of this model.

2. Modes of Learning. A new degree pattern of learning and teaching that adjusts to capacities, circumstances, and interests of a different clientele than is customary. This results in special adult degree programs. This model includes the Bachelor and Master of Liberal Studies degrees offered by the College of Coninuing Education of the University of Oklahoma.

3. The Examination. The candidate earns his/her degree exclusively on the basis of examinations - both written and oral. The Regents' Baccalaureate Degree of New York is of this type.

4. Validation. An institution or agency evaluates the student's total learning experiences however gained. Any additional requirements are indicated and when met, the degree is awarded. CLEP and Advanced Placement exams follow this model as does the Office on Educational Credit of the American Council on Education through the ACE registry.

5. Credits. An institution or agency that does not itself offer instruction awards credits and degrees for which it sets standards and vouches for the quality of student programming. The United States does not have a direct example. In England, the Council for National Academic Awards follows this model by awarding the degrees with courses and exams taken in participating colleges.

6. Complex systems. A degree granting institution or agency reshapes its pattern of services by combining simpler models of external degrees into an external degree system. Empire State College of New York is such a model.

(adapted from Valley in Gould and Cross, 1972)

These approaches to higher education have created an impact in the last decade and I predict that it is within these perimeters that institutions will internalize the technological advances of the next two decades.

Which learners choose non-traditional education and/or external degrees? Sosdian and Sharp in a report funded by NIE-HEW (National Institute of Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1977) discussed the characteristics of learners choosing external degree programs at the Associate and Bachelor level. Among their conclusions:

1. External degree holders are adults who choose this option to avoid sacrificing commitment to work and family responsibilities.

2. Credit for work or life experience seldom influences their choice.

3. A large proportion worked full time in responsible positions and were earning commensurately. While they were looking for work-related benefits, most were not seeking initial job market access.

4. Motivation included personal satisfaction and increased respect from others.

5. Most were thirty or older but already had implemented plans for further education by the time of the study.

My observations of Nova Doctoral students concur with these characteristics. In addition, enrollees held at least one master's degree, the majority of degrees from traditional settings, and some had previously been accepted in traditional doctoral programs. While many chose Nova because of its field based emphasis which insures relevance by relating theory and practice to the job setting, the majority of the feedback I received from Nova students seemed to indicate that the ability to remain on their jobs was the primary factor in choosing an external degree. At the risk of overgeneralizing from a very limited sample, I submit that the economic climate of the 70's when jobs for the Ph.D. or Ed.D. were not plentiful and there was limited job mobility was a major factor from the enrollee's standpoint.

I believe that these enrollees were less pioneers than the products of their circumstances. While my observations show students with a high self concept, arising in part from successes in school and on the job, and unafraid to make uncommon life decisions, different economic times might have found them making a traditional decision. But from this base, the 1980's and perhaps the 1990's have been forged and Valley's models will be a strong part of the "traditional" for the remainder of this century.

In conclusion, I would like to touch on two barriers which have hampered growth in this higher education innovation. A major barrier for the potential adult student was lack of adequate information about non-traditional choices. The question of maximizing choice gains importance when we realize that in the last fifteen years, the number of adult students has increased by more than 150% with government figures showing nearly five million adults now enrolled in college (Hoponski and McCabe, 1982). Needed is a network of accessible

adult counseling centers across the country whose mission is to help the potential adult student to assess his/her needs and to locate the school or other educational provider best equipped to meet the individual's academic requirements -- "one-stop shopping," so to speak. This would provide options for the learner and give all institutions the opportunity to input through the network. In turn, it could provide that competitive edge to those schools with a genuine interest in meeting the adult learner's needs.

One caution is necessary when stressing the need for options. To paraphrase Alan Cartler (Cartler in Stauffer, 1981), "Options can be a costly luxury if it is accomplished by ignorance." Locale, traditional, external degree, are not the key components of an option system. The program offered is the key. The rest are characteristics which are only appropriate if they are the best mode in which to meet both program and learner's needs. In addition, as Cross (1982) points out, "well managed information systems could help state and community planners provide for the needs of the adult learners while reducing overlap and waste."

The goal of establishing such a network challenges any adult educator whose mission is directed to providing higher education opportunities for the adult. Until dreams become reality, however, our best local resource usually remains the library. For those of you who need to counsel the adult learner in such choices and would like to know more about external degrees, may I recommend, How to Earn a College Degree Without Attending College by Susan and John Hartman (1979), which describes only fully accredited external degrees, and Earning a Degree Without Going to College by Dwain Davis (1976), which describes both accredited and unaccredited programs.

Lastly, I would like to address the issue of quality which is the barrier thrown up most often when non-traditional programs are discussed, almost as if traditional equates with quality and nothing else does. However, as Robert Persig said in a quote from Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (Persig, 1975),

> Quality . . . you know what it is, yet you don't know what it is. But that's self-contradictory. But some things are better than others, that is, they have more quality. But when you try to say what that quality is, apart from the things that have it, it all goes poof! There's nothing to talk about. But if you can't say what quality is, how do you know that it even exists? If no one knows what it is, then for all practical purposes it doesn't exist at all. But for all practical purposes it does exist. What else are grades based on? Why else would people pay fortunes for some things and throw others in the trash pile? Obviously, some things are better than others . . . but what's the "betterness?" . . . So round and round you go, spinning mental wheels and nowhere finding anyplace to get traction. What the hell is quality--what is it??

We may not know precisely but from an examination of the literature, everyone seems to want to define it. Articles on the topic abound. What we do know is that in examining the question of quality we must remember that "there are three higher education traditions--self-realization, serving social needs, and the research tradition. Within these traditions we construct courses in four ways--subject centered, role centered, student centered, and community centered" (Williams, 1977). To evaluate these structures and traditions, we must use assessment measures appropriate to the goals undertaken. Most assessments of quality fall into two categories: process measures which assume if certain processes are in place, good education will result; and outcome measures which assume a value-added situation; namely, measuring how persons change and grow as a result of their school experience. It is my position that we must use multiple indicators which include both process and outcomes. We should be examining the learning process/ goal relationship, not concerning ourselves with traditional--non-traditional

labeling.

As adult educators, we must provide the adult learner with the best educational opportunities we can, including those that the latest learning innovations make available. At the same time, we know if the adult is not to be cheated, the quality of the educational experience must be assured. We must be the watchdogs to assure quality education from all institutions.

You who are here tonight have chosen to become founding members of AAACE in order to better serve adult learners and to have a positive impact on development affecting you and your profession in these exciting times. In that spirit, I challenge you to examine carefully this major innovation in the learning community. You will want to ask hard questions. Are the competencies defined for the program? Does the approach used achieve these competencies? How are the necessary learnings being measured? Is the program's value to society being counted? To what degree? Are the program options being made known to the public? Does it suit the individual needs of the students it attracts?

While in the last analysis, the quality of any program--innovative or otherwise--rests upon the professional integrity of the individual faculty members involved and upon the integrity of the institution they serve, we have a responsibility to these innovations in learning. They are here today as we speak. They are a part of higher education 1982. Their usefulness, their growth, their options, their quality and integrity are a responsibility we as adult educators must share. We must be willing to accept that responsibility.

I would like to end by paraphrasing a biblical quote from Deuteronomy (29:9-14; 30:11-20): That which we are being charged to do as adult educators is not too hard for us or too remote. It is not in heaven for us to say, who will go up

to heaven and bring it down to us that we may do it? Nor is it beyond the sea, that we should say, who will cross the sea for us and bring it over to us, that we may do it? No, it is very near to us, in our mouth and in our heart, and we can do it.

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